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Frameworks for Failure, or What Happened to the Social Turn in Writing Studies?

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Introduction

The *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (2011), developed collaboratively with representatives from the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project, identifies eight habits of mind essential for success in college writing:

- Curiosity—the desire to know more about the world.
- Openness—the willingness to consider new ways of being and thinking in the world.
- Engagement—a sense of investment and involvement in learning.
- Creativity—the ability to use novel approaches for generating, investigating, and representing ideas.
- Persistence—the ability to sustain interest in and attention to short- and long-term projects.
- Responsibility—the ability to take ownership of one's actions and understand the consequences of those actions for oneself and others.
- Flexibility—the ability to adapt to situations, expectations, or demands.
- Metacognition—the ability to reflect on one's own thinking as well as on the individual and cultural processes used to structure knowledge. (1)

The *Framework* also identifies particular writing, reading, and critical analysis "experiences" that "contribute to habits of mind that are crucial to success in college" (6), such as developing rhetorical knowledge through learning

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and practicing rhetorical concepts, writing and analyzing a variety of types of texts, and writing for different and real audiences.

The experiences, which are essentially the amended "WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition" (Council of Writing Program Administrators 2014), make sense and are deeply embedded in the research literature cited in a growing bibliography. Many writing programs, including our composition program at the University of California, Irvine, promote such experiences with explicit reference to the WPA statement. Moreover, the habits of mind, which comprise our primary focus in this article, appear unimpeachable in their abstraction. Who but a malcontent would balk at curiosity, engagement, responsibility, and all the rest? Optimistically, these abstractions and their brief descriptions invoke the fuzzy image of one's best self or ideal student: individuals who, materialized, may in fact vary against unhappy specifics such as body or background but still can share in their abstraction these happy habits of mind. We, as authors, are charmed by the language of phenomenology that opens "being-in-the-world" to reflection and horizonal engagement at the practical level wherever that may reside, but especially in the college writing classroom where the assessment push has often appeared technocratic. The *Framework* pushes many of the right buttons and is doing, no doubt, important work.

But why so darned positive? We like to be just as positive as anyone else, just as optimistic. We also fear failure, and we understand that failure is, shall we say, not the most fundable project in these times and places. But what happens when such optimism in the abstract runs up against the very real negativities and negative emotions that help shape our own pedagogical practices for worse—but also perhaps for better? At the very least we may find ourselves out of sorts, confused, disoriented. Perhaps as professionals we are disoriented because, despite the good but relatively marginal emotion studies of Lynn Worsham, Laura R. Micciche, Susan Miller, and others,[1] our practices that implicate negative emotions do not find their own recognizable framework in our professional literature and principles. This article is motivated by such professional disorientation, as it binds more closely the "emotional turn" in writing studies to the *Framework* and practices that govern by different means altogether.

To introduce our critique of the habits of mind in their happier abstraction, to defamiliarize our keyword common sense, we begin with a concrete *OED* history of the first habit word, *curiosity*.[2] The word *curious* is derived from the Latin *cūra*, which means not only *care* and *concern* in the best sense but also *worry*. Classically, this means *inquisitive*; however, it can

also mean *meddlesome*, *officious*, *prying*, and then substantively *one who pries*, *the secret police*, *the informer*. *Curiosity* is the application of care or attention. In the 1568 *Scholemaster*, Roger Ascham writes that *Cæs. Commentaries* are to be read "with all curiositie." In 1676 Thomas Shadwell's *Virtuoso* predicts "you will arrive at that curiosity in this watery science [and by this he means swimming] that not a frog breathing will exceed you." A year earlier Thomas Brooks in the *Golden Key to Open Hidden Treasures* condemns curiosity as spiritual drunkenness, as adultery of the soul. Much later (and beyond the *OED*), Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time* (1962) writes famously on curiosity, or *Neugier*: "Curiosity is everywhere and nowhere. . . . Idle talk controls even the ways in which one may be curious. It says what one 'must' have read and seen" (217). Our initial suggestion is that, in the abstract, the habits reside in historical and emotional complexities, even contradictions, that are worth acknowledging, perhaps even honoring. And then what happens, we want to know, when we take this methodological set piece that grounds the *Framework*'s abstract *curiosity* and apply it to the *Framework* as a whole, that is to say, when we move the document through, and then beyond, its immediate institutional uptake, working to reestablish some of the historical and cultural conditions that have made it appear so commonsensical? The hope is that we can thereby rediscover, even honor, some of the critical work that now seems obscured by the *Framework*'s polished surface.

The exigence for such critique is pressing. As Judith Summerfield and Philip M. Anderson report in a 2012 college English symposium (546), and as we have observed, the *Framework* has been taken up readily by instructors, writing programs, and upper administrators. We divide our critique into four sections. First, we closely read some significant disconnect between the abstract bullet points listing the habits and the concrete practice recommendations called activities, and we thus try to provide a new analytic foothold into the document itself. This foothold, we suggest, appears in a new policy-oriented genre that favors the "executive summary" plus some kind of appendix, over the more traditional argumentative genres of academic scholarship where claims must be rigorously scaffolded. No doubt this policy orientation provides some strategic advantage when it comes to communication among policy makers and administrators, especially as a response to the assessment push. However, such orientation also introduces some new rhetorical weaknesses and, perhaps, the wrong kind of practical ambiguities when received by instructors as trickle-down wisdom. Second, and again following comments by Summerfield and Anderson, we establish context for the *Framework*'s "habits of mind" structure in John Dewey's philosophy of

education, but also in postwar positive psychology that threatens to blunt the social turn in writing studies, now barely legible in the *Framework*. Third, we introduce an alternative in recent critical and queer theory, where negative emotions and even failure have been revalued. Finally, we rework our professional response to the assessment push by way of this queer and critical pedagogy where negative emotion can take its place as a substantive dimension of education.

Uses and Abuses of Usefulness in the *Framework*

We begin by reviewing how the *Framework* is supposed to be used. Explaining how the *Framework* was created by college writing teachers and researchers as a response to the new Common Core State Standards for K-12, standards intended to ensure that students are "college ready," framers Peggy O'Neill and colleagues conclude with an injunction directed at those that would implement and assess the standards: "If the goal is to make certain that all students are prepared to succeed in college and career, then, at least in terms of writing, it's imperative that the Standards and the assessments promote the activities and habits of mind outlined in the *Framework*" (2012: 524). So the *Framework*, and in particular the habits of mind, are supposed to have some tight relationship to standard assessment, or to be more precise, standard writing assessments should be designed to promote the relevant activities and habits of mind. But in fact, cleverly, the *Framework* produces untestable claims or, rather, untestable associations between the activities and habits. Even more confusing, the activities "foster" habits of mind, as opposed to the aforementioned experiences that "contribute to" the habits of mind. This untestability appears clever because the document is designed, in part, to address the testing mania that has unevenly gripped our education system since at least No Child Left Behind.[3] The associative links between habits and activities are not so tightly coupled that the linkage would be testable; in fact, one can mix and match without losing legibility. If you approach the *Framework* backward, for instance, starting with an activity and then asking, what habit of mind is produced by this activity, you would have a hard time finding the right answer. Take, for instance, the activity called in the *Framework* using "inquiry as a process to develop questions relevant for authentic audiences within a variety of disciplines" (4). Ask yourself, what habit or habits of mind does this activity generate? We might answer ambition, or solicitude (to be a bit cheeky), but one might also stick to the bullet points and say curiosity, or openness, or engagement, or creativity, or

persistence, or responsibility, or flexibility, or even metacognition. After all, doesn't such multidisciplinary engagement (one of the habits, incidentally) require metacognition, which is to say thinking about thinking? The right answer, by the way, is curiosity. So it would be impossible to adequately test the hypothesis that using inquiry in this way fosters curiosity, even when curiosity is vaguely explained as "the desire to know more about the world." The link—which has the aura if not the name of causality—is untestable because *curiosity* in this instance either is too abstract and equivocal to serve as a verifiable outcome in any given study or is understood in circular fashion where by definition the activity produces curiosity and curiosity is produced by the activity. Neither of these linkages is adequate on formal, argumentative, or scientific grounds.[4]

To be fair, recent work in composition studies attempts to specify our understanding of habits of mind in relation to writing and critical thinking curricula. Linda Adler-Kassner and colleagues actually question the existence of "all-purpose habits of mind that exist within liberal learning" and instead try to isolate "discipline-specific concepts that operate within some number (two, in our case) different contexts" (2012: n.p.). In their article, the authors reference the habits of flexibility, curiosity, and metacognition, but as the article unfolds they demonstrate concretely how these habits of mind become meaningful only when practiced within a particular context: notably, in this case, genre analysis (labeled as a form of metacognition) across the disciplines of sociology and history. Our point is that the habits of mind always need such application if they are to make sense, but one would not know this reading the *Framework* in isolation, which means that the door is open to a misreading in the direction of positive psychology. In short, the problem is primarily one of uptake, not intent.

So what are the framers up to as they respond to the testing mania with pedagogical directives that are, above all, untestable? We believe they are performing a communicative act of some significance in the pedagogical arena because it functions by means other than hypothesis/test or argumentation that can be formally falsified. This move has some real strategic and rhetorical import insofar as it performs very differently from what is now expected in the domain of education and administrative science, in which measurable results are demanded from programs on which taxpayer monies are sometimes spent. The habits of mind are unobjectionable but also gesture to complexities of learning that may not be—and perhaps should not be—reduced to testable skills. Counterproductively, the document must then

work by way of prima facie plausibility, or a certain kind of common sense, whereby readers can imagine all sorts of synergy among the activities and the habits, synergy rendered plausible because it affirms our exasperation with the testing culture. Moreover, its generic quality fits with the current communicative culture where bullet points and PowerPoint presentations predominate (i.e., *not* discursive arguments).

No doubt our professional focus on authentic audiences within a variety of disciplines is meaningful, consequential, and worthwhile. Our writing programs at the University of California, Irvine, for instance, are moving in this direction, with our leading national organizations providing much helpful material and citable research. From our purview, the habits seem unobjectionable; the experiences and the activities even seem concretely desirable as they dovetail with years of professional wisdom and research. The problem is that the loose association between activities and habits allows the background of positive psychology to emerge inadvertently, an emergence that can neatly fit into a broader culture where positive psychology can seem both familiar and right. In fact, we now turn to documenting in some detail this cultural and intellectual scaffolding in positive psychology and then suggest ways in which prima facie but untestable plausibility precludes all sorts of important pedagogies, including queer and critical, that the profession has promoted over the last couple of decades to great effect.

Habits of Mind: From Dewey to Positive Psychology to Composition

Whence *habits of mind*? With a long tradition in educational psychology, the habits address a new problem generated by the assessment push. As noted above, authors of the *Framework* are responding to state and federal pressures to assess the efficacy of instruction, particularly as taxpayers and politicians scrutinize how public funds are spent on education. Kristine Johnson explains how this response from writing experts is motivated: "Conversations about accountability in higher education reveal that many Americans understand the purpose of higher education as primarily credentialing: students attend college in exchange for a credential they will use in the labor market" (2013: 522). Such credentialing calls forth rhetorics of success and failure, of those who can achieve and those who cannot, as well as attendant assessment mechanisms that measure success and pinpoint failure. Johnson analyzes how the language of the *Framework* shifts the emphasis from demonstrable skills and strategies to something less demonstrable in the short term but arguably more important in the long term, namely, the dispositions for civic and ethical agency. As Johnson sees it, composition and rhetoric courses can

better "focus attention on the civic and ethical agency of student writers—behaviors that are neither included in standardized curricula nor fully captured in assessment instruments" (523). "Through its focus on habits of mind," Johnson explains, "the *Framework* reframes a widespread public narrative about written products and quantified achievements with an alternate narrative about writers and their development" (518). A keyword of the assessment era—*success*—is reappropriated in the *Framework* by attaching it not to test results but, rather, to positive dispositions.

Linking habits of mind to civic and ethical agency evokes a venerable tradition in composition studies and American educational philosophy more broadly. Specifically, the phrase *habits of mind* comes from the American pragmatists and notably from the work of John Dewey, who, in *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, argues that a democratic society "must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder" ([1916] 1922: 115). For Dewey, such habits of mind are not just cognitive achievements, such as testable book knowledge of civics, nor are they just noncognitive reflexes, like following the leader. Habits of mind, Dewey qualifies, are "not exhausted . . . in [the] executive and motor phase" (57). Instead civically and ethically oriented habits of mind would incline the student toward responsible civic engagement. They would include cognitive, emotional, and embodied dispositions developed not by an isolated individual but, rather, in relation to concrete social situations. Dewey clarifies that these habits of mind mean the "formation of intellectual and emotional disposition as well as an increase in the ease, economy, and efficiency of action. Any habit marks an *inclination*—an active preference and choice for the conditions involved in its exercise" (57). Similarly, the habits outlined in the *Framework* emphasize disposition, not demonstration; capacity, not cognition; flexibility, not reflex; and the critical capacity called "metacognition" in the *Framework* is called "social change" habits in Dewey.

But unavoidably, *habits of mind* also implicates the educational psychologist Arthur L. Costa, who has cornered the market on this term in the K-12 arena.[5] In "A *Framework* Adrift," Summerfield and Anderson (2012: 545) note that, even though the *Framework* does not cite Costa, its enumeration of habits and Costa's have much in common. In the following list of Costa's habits of mind, concepts and characteristics shared with the *Framework* are shown in boldface:

1. **Persisting**
2. Managing Impulsivity
3. **Listening with Understanding and Empathy**
4. **Thinking Flexibly**
5. **Thinking about Thinking (Metacognition)**
6. Striving for Accuracy
7. **Questioning and Posing Problems**
8. **Applying Past Knowledge to New Situations**
9. Thinking and Communicating with Clarity and Precision
10. **Gathering Data through All Senses**
11. **Creating, Imagining, Innovating**
12. Responding with Wonderment and Awe
13. Taking Responsible Risks
14. Finding Humor
15. **Thinking Interdependently**
16. **Remaining Open to Continuous Learning** (Costa and Kalick 2007)[6]

Even if the authors of the *Framework* were not working directly with Costa but were instead referencing a common progenitor in educational psychology, notably Dewey, the language of Costa is so pervasive in educational psychology that it casts a long shadow that threatens to overwhelm any connection to Dewey. Moreover "habits of mind" discourse permeates the Common Core, which means that K-12 educational psychology surely inserted itself as a key reference point as the framers attempted to articulate, or at least gesture toward, a coherent K-16 curricular pathway. The current plausibility of the *Framework*'s habits—their appeal and their common sense—owes at least as much to Costa as it does to Dewey.

We highlight this connection because we believe the *Framework* invokes not only the civic mindedness of Dewey, but also the aura of positive psychology in which positive emotions like happiness supposedly lead to success, while negative emotions like anxiety, anger, and resentment lead, presumably, to failures, which we are taught to avoid. Whence this strong link between happiness and success? Or, to put this another way, how does orientation toward "success" in the *Framework* implicate happiness—understood as a positive disposition—without naming this positive emotion per se? The fulcrum, curiously enough, is habits of mind—a resonant concept that implicates Costa's brand of educational psychology at least as much as Dewey and, as Summerfield and Anderson (2012) point out, also gestures to success narratives and self-help books, such as Stephen R. Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989). Although the experiences and

the activities of the *Framework* are scaffolded by a substantial literature in composition and writing studies, the habits are not, which leaves the reader fishing for these more elusive and perhaps even disavowed reference points. We pick up the trail that Summerfield and Anderson point out and trace the deep background of positive psychology and its attendant narratives of happiness and success that make the rhetoric of the *Framework* so resonant and commonsensical.

A substantial critique of the link between happiness and success was recently offered by Barbara Ehrenreich in *Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America* (2009). Connecting the dots from post-Calvinist "New Thought" of the late nineteenth century to Norman Vincent Peale's blockbuster *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952), and then finally to the 1990s rise of happiness science, Ehrenreich maps an inverse relationship between positive psychology and critical consciousness. To demonstrate how in the literature this happiness-leads-to-success argument works, it is worth reviewing a substantial passage from a key 2005 article by Sonja Lyubomirsky and colleagues. In this article, the authors summarize,

> we review evidence suggesting that happy people—those who experience a preponderance of positive emotions—tend to be successful and accomplished across multiple life domains. Why is happiness linked to successful outcomes? We propose that this is not merely because success leads to happiness, but because positive affect . . . engenders success. Positively valenced moods and emotions lead people to think, feel, and act in ways that promote both resource building and involvement with approach goals. An individual experiencing a positive mood or emotion is encountering circumstances that he or she interprets as desirable. Positive emotions signify that life is going well, the person's goals are being met, and resources are adequate. In these circumstances, . . . people are ideally situated to "broaden and build." In other words, because all is going well, individuals can expand their resources and friendships; they can take the opportunity to build their repertoire of skills for future use; or they can rest and relax to rebuild their energy after expending high levels of effort. [One] model suggests that a critical adaptive purpose of positive emotions is to help prepare the organism for future challenges. . . . The characteristics related to positive affect include confidence, optimism, and self-efficacy; likability and positive construals of others; sociability, activity, and energy; prosocial behavior; immunity and physical well-being; effective coping with challenge and stress; and originality and flexibility. What these attributes share is that they all encourage active involvement with goal pursuits and with the environment. When all is going well, a person is not well served by withdrawing into a self-protective stance in which the primary aim is to protect his or her

existing resources and to avoid harm—a process marking the experience of negative emotions. (804)

Four elements are worth noting here. First, happiness is defined narrowly as a positive personal experience and not, as Vivasvan Soni (2010) has recently demonstrated, a life well lived, which is something else altogether and which has a longer provenance in the Western tradition at least. Second, as we demonstrate below in relation to classic expressivist writing pedagogy, positive affect (here happiness) is linked to success because it opens up the organism instead of shutting it down. Third, positive emotion comes at the expense of negative emotion, which is devalued as environment distancing. Finally, the entire scenario places an organism of one disposition or another in an environment that sounds much more biological than social and that, at the very least, makes no room for analytic frameworks that proceed by way of social analysis and critical consciousness.

As Ehrenreich summarizes,

The central claim of positive psychology, as of positive thinking generally, is that happiness—or optimism, positive emotions, positive affect, or positive *something*—is not only desirable in and of itself but actually useful, leading to better health and greater success. . . . The real conservatism of positive psychology lies in its attachment to the status quo, with all its inequalities and abuses of power. Positive psychologists' tests of happiness and well-being, for example, rest heavily on measures of personal contentment with things as they are. (2009: 158–59)

And indeed, Lyubomirsky et al.'s key article, coauthored by positive psychology luminary Ed Diener, defines success precisely in terms of the status quo:

Being successful means accomplishing those things that are valued by one's culture, flourishing in terms of the goals set forth by one's society. Hence, our focal question is whether happy people on average are better able to achieve the values and goals they have been socialized to believe are worthwhile. As Sigmund Freud reportedly once said, *lieben und arbeiten*—to love and to work—are what a "normal" person should be able to perform well. Few people would oppose, in any culture, the addition of health to love and work as a critical ingredient to a successful life. (2005: 822)

Moreover, such practical orientation toward success is not brand-new but, rather, is supposed to be embedded in our nation's history. Covey (1989: 18) explains how his own research was enriched by reviewing the "success

literature" published in the United States since 1776. All this is to say that the *Framework* document would have a profound but not insurmountable challenge wresting their key term *success* from the positive psychology literature and its gerrymandered intellectual history. However, since that particular challenge of the document is not addressed, *success* associations drift toward the obvious tendencies in our current popular and intellectual climate. What about the negative emotions referenced by Lyubomirsky and colleagues such as sadness, anxiety, and anger (2005: 816)? What about emotional dynamics relevant to "social change," as Dewey put it? We pick up this critical thread soon, but before doing so we want to connect our discussion of positive psychology to composition and writing studies per se, and we do so initially by noting some significant overlap between early positive psychology of the 1960s and contemporaneous pedagogies in writing studies.

Positive psychology is part of the deep background informing not only the *Framework* but also an entire strain of composition pedagogy—particularly expressivist and process pedagogies threaded throughout the *Framework*. Even before the official advent of positive psychology in the 1960s, writing instructors linked expressive and creative writing with positive psychological benefits. In "A Century of Writing Instruction in School and College English" (2001), Catherine L. Hobbs and James A. Berlin describe how self-expression and creative writing were important elements of writing instruction between the two world wars, resurfacing powerfully after behaviorist and cognitivist turns in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. One of Hobbs and Berlin's primary sources, Kenneth J. Kantor's article "Creative Expression in the English Curriculum" (1975), directly links the interest in expression in the 1930s and 1940s to broadly psychological (here specifically "psychoanalytic") philosophies. According to Kantor, proponents of creative expression pedagogies were "influenced by psychoanalytic theory" and "claimed that creative work allows students to release pent-up emotion, and thus enhances their psychological well-being" (18). In fact, *well-being* has become a key term of positive psychology, witnessed in the landmark textbook coauthored by Nobel prize winner Daniel Kahneman, with Ed Diener, and Norbert Schwarz, *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology* (1999).

Broadly considered, the early discourse of positive psychology found anchors in a range of popular conversations and academic fields including composition, which turned toward the psychological benefits of writing. We can see meaningful connections between positive psychology and emerging composition practices in the works of Peter Elbow, Mina P. Shaughnessy, and Ken Macrorie. In *Telling Writing* (1970), Macrorie tells us how to cre-

ate a positive environment for writing, a move that has become standard commenting practice: "Avoid beginning comments about writing with small points. First, let the writer know your large reaction, especially if it's positive" (87). To be sure, Macrorie insists that good writing tells the "truth," even if difficult, but this difficulty appears within the context of a generally positive tone. Miller aptly summarizes how Macrorie's work describes "writing as self-actualizing processes" and "associates a writer's successes with self-esteem" (1991: 297). Emphasizing self-actualization and empowerment resonated with the social movements of the time, but it also had a critical edge in that social and political context. The opening paragraph of Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* (1977) links the protests of the 1960s with the needs of increasingly diverse and differently prepared students. Shaughnessy's text challenges administrators with their "misgivings" and "guess[es] in the dark" (1) to honor the experiences and knowledges of their new students, to shift their expectations from reluctance to openness.

But the link between expressivist composition pedagogies and positive psychology is most direct in the early work of Elbow, who famously recounts in *Writing without Teachers* (1973) his need to reject the academic apparatus of fear and shame in order to write. Working under the constraints of a disciplined academic model, Elbow felt "wounded and tired" (xiii), a "total failure" (xiv), "lonely, hurting, and panicked" (xv)—that is, until in 1968, sitting alone with the typewriter, he started blurting out onto the page: free writing. We should remember that the year 1968, with its famous summer of love, evokes not only the social movements of empowerment and agency but also scream therapy, T-groups, encounter groups, and other forms of self-expression touted for purging negative emotions on the way to positive emotion and self-actualization. Indeed, Elbow describes how he was at the time studying psychology on the side, referencing Abraham H. Maslow's *Motivation and Personality* (1954), Paul Goodman's *Compulsory Mis-education and the Community of Scholars* (1966), next to a key title we have already mentioned in this article: Dewey's *Democracy and Education*. While Elbow disavows a direct link with positive psychology (writing in an e-mail to Jonathan Alexander dated August 9, 2014, "I didn't know of the positive psychology work or movement. I think what I was referring to was all the stuff about T-groups and encounter groups"), his reference to Maslow is significant, given what an important progenitor of positive psychology Maslow has been. In *Motivation and Personality*, for instance, Maslow pits expression against merely coping, linking expression with the flow of ideas that would become the flow of expressivist free writing (1954: 184–86).

The *Framework*—despite its distance from expressivist pedagogy per se—picks up some of the same threads, especially openness as opposed to fear, allowing for growth intrinsic to the organism. Fostering a student's inherent dispositions and abilities optimizes learning, creating the practical and emotional conditions for success. And then with the outward-directed goal of "success," the *Framework* largely leaves the early countercultural spirit of expressivist pedagogy behind.

Negative Emotion and Critical Consciousness

We have spent some time unpacking this deeply shared background of positive psychology and early composition theory because, we argue, it persists as an overwhelming thread in the *Framework*. Indeed, we might argue that the *Framework* achieves plausibility in part by invoking a warrant deeply embedded in this current popular and intellectual climate: happiness leads to success. Our concern is that critical elements of the *Framework* recalling Dewey can easily give way to the postcritical insistence of positive psychology, especially since the document appears in a social and administrative environment where positive psychology appeals for a number of reasons.

Self-actualization is not a bad goal, and we imagine it feels good. Happily, our field has moved, with Elbow, from the negative and punishing pedagogies of a certain "current traditionalism" to more positive and rewarding pedagogies. But why fear failure? Recent reports, both in the academy and out, point to the rise of "competency-based education" and the use of specific metrics to measure the kinds of concrete skills college degrees can certify.[7] Calls for such measures and a host of attendant assessment practices privilege success in quantifiable skills as the mark of achievement both for students and for faculty instructing them. A consequent fear of failure permeates much work in higher education. This should not be surprising in the No Child Left Behind era. Even the phrase itself seems an uncomplicated call to ensure that no student fails and that our educational institutions must ensure success, or at least prevent failure, of falling behind. The military metaphor of No Child Left Behind (never leave a man behind) is tweaked into sports analogies with the Race to the Top grants offered by the US Department of Education to provide "competitive grants to encourage and reward States that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform" (2013: n.p.). Either analogy—military or sport—suggests winners and losers, success and failure. Reinforcing this approach to education, the assessment movement demands success, or at least the demonstration of success and the concurrent production of failures (often euphemistically identified as "challenges")

that need addressing, remediation, and fixing in order to "close the feedback loop" and facilitate student success.

So how is success oriented in the *Framework*? Primarily toward college and career readiness and less, if at all, toward the more radical ethos we find in the early work of Elbow or in the subsequent critical pedagogies of such scholar-teachers as Ira Shor, who also claims Dewey as an intellectual progenitor. In *Empowering Education* (1992), Shor uses the synonymous phrase "habits of thought" to define a critical pedagogy oriented toward deep critique. He values "habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse" (129). Likewise civic-oriented, the *Framework* "takes as a central premise that teaching writing and learning to write are central to education and to the development of a literate citizenry" (2011: 2). However, the "ability to write well" is linked primarily and explicitly to college preparation and career success: "Students who come to college writing with these habits of mind and these experiences will be well positioned to meet the writing challenges in the full spectrum of academic courses and later in their careers" (2). The words *critique* and *democracy* never appear in the *Framework*. Scholarship of the social turn in composition studies, with its emphasis on both the social situatedness of language use and its ethos of preparing students to be critically engaged with their world, is largely absent. Surely, the emphasis in the *Framework* on college and career readiness seems rhetorically pitched to address the current assessment climate. But by instrumentalizing the document and connecting "habits of mind" to college and career readiness, an entire trajectory of compositional practice and pedagogy is obscured.

At first this elision struck us as odd. If the "habits of mind" stem from the work of Dewey, and if the process pedagogies beginning with expressivism were at least in part stimulated by the empowering—and radical—movements of the late 1960s, why is the social turn largely absent from this document? Our analysis of the *Framework* linking it to Dewey but also to positive psychology should help explain this thundering silence. And we worry about what is left out in that silence. Positive rhetorics linking happiness to success render negative emotions such as unhappiness, anxiety, and anger counterproductive, in that they variously "shut down" the organism. But at their best, negative emotions potentially signal the need for critique

and often motivate people who experience the world differently, people who have an unhappy orientation toward what Diener and the positive psychologists consider key social norms.

Precisely along these lines, recent work in queer studies has reexamined and revalued the work of negative affect and emotions typically associated with failure. At the same time, queer affect studies offers a useful model for how happiness per se creates behavioral norms, beliefs, and actions. Sara Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness* (2010) shows how "feelings are attributed to objects, such that some things and not others become happiness and unhappiness causes" (14), which helps explain how the experience of happiness is not just a personal disposition but is, rather, the product of distinct social circumstances where certain sorts of activities are valued while others are not. As Ahmed puts it, "We are directed by the promise of happiness, as the promise that happiness is what follows if we do this or that" (14). Moreover, relational values are not neutral or equitable but, rather, normalizing. "Attributions of happiness," Ahmed concludes, "might be how social norms and ideals become affective, as if relative proximity to those norms and ideals creates happiness" (11). So, when in the introduction to the *Framework* we read about how students taught the habits of mind will be "well positioned" to meet the challenges of academic and career writing, we can consider, with Ahmed, what affective work the habits play with respect to these particular action objects (i.e., academic and career writing). Being "well-positioned" toward these action objects would in this interpretation feel better, whereas being positioned poorly toward academic and career writing would feel worse. No kidding. The problem lies in naturalizing and normalizing this affective relation where Ahmed's "happiness causes" do their work structurally to reinforce the status quo and individuals respond by way of calibrating their own feelings—tutored, in this case, by the *Framework*. In this way the *Framework* (inadvertently) back-propagates a feeling structure where students and teachers are ultimately held responsible.[8] Obscured is a feeling structure like dissatisfaction or anger that might help us understand how current norms of success position some people poorly despite, or sometimes indeed because of, their own efforts or that of their teachers.

How in the United States can we understand in political and hegemonic terms the broad strokes of positive psychology? Ehrenreich's critique is helpful up to a point, but her "hard-nosed empiricism" and her endorsement of enlightenment values over superstition (2009: 197) ultimately disappoint as they fold into neoliberal measures of just the sort she initially critiques. Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* (2011) does a better job showing

how, in fact, it is precisely the measures of neoliberalism that produced our current crisis where everything is oriented toward success while everyone feels like he or she is failing at everything, all the time. A relation of cruel optimism exists, according to Berlant, when "something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. It might involve food, or a kind of love; it might be a fantasy of the good life, or a political project. It might rest on something simpler, too, like a new habit that promises to induce in you an improved way of being" (1). And wouldn't a perfect example of the relation Berlant calls cruel optimism exist in our newly urgent habits of mind that promise to induce in our students an improved way of being, namely, a more successful orientation toward college and career success (at the same time that they obfuscate how we all might be usefully disoriented toward these particular lifestyle norms)? Berlant focuses in particular on the end of the postwar good-life fantasy and the rise of neoliberalism in the United States and Europe—a scene that would implicate us and our students, as well as the organizational structures at every level that give our school lives meaning, which includes (or so goes the argument) fantasies of successful personhood that become decreasingly accessible—hence the queer theorists' (and our) injunction to take negative emotions seriously.

Queer theorists point out how unhappiness, dissatisfaction, and even failure might serve as entry points to critique the power structures and normalizing discourses that direct our lives and efforts along certain lines. In *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), Judith Halberstam argues that "failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world" (2–3). As a critique, failure is "a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline." And as a practice, failure "recognizes that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent; indeed failure can exploit the unpredictability of ideology and its indeterminate qualities" (88).

Next to a "framework for success" we offer a "framework for failure" that can help us better understand how failure and negative emotions are an ineradicable and sometimes crucial component of our educational lives. We have plenty of company in this effort. Developing a Deweyan–Freirean model of critical pedagogy, for instance, Shor calls for "a holistic, historically situated, politically aware intervention in society to solve a felt need or problem, to get something done in a context of reflective action" (1996: 162). Such reflective "intervention," based on a "*felt* need or problem," is embodied in the experience of systematic failure, in an affective register of our insufficient

and sometimes botched practice of democracy. Likewise, queer theorists remind us that we can turn such failure, our disappointment and frustration, into critique, into the kind of "politically aware intervention" that is not just a logical operation or career preparation.

Fewer than Seven Habits of Relatively Unsuccessful People

Our critique of the *Framework* is sometimes strident, but it is so only because we feel something important is elided as we rush toward student success—namely, a more robust consideration of negative emotions vis-à-vis writing pedagogy and the structures that support it. Certainly composition studies have dealt with negative emotions in the past. Pre-1970s pedagogies of error correction, shame, and punishment were rightly and soundly critiqued by the likes of Joseph Williams, Mina Shaughnessy, and Peter Elbow, who helped us turn the tide toward positive pedagogies and positive emotions sympathetic with a larger culture where affirmation was newly important. In "More Than a Feeling: Disappointment and WPA Work," Micciche (2002: 432) "address[es] the climate of disappointment that characterizes English studies generally and composition studies—particularly writing program administration (WPA)—specifically." For Micciche, such disappointment should not remain a "characteristic," something that WPAs "have," but, rather, should become the grounds through which WPAs and composition programs reimagine themselves and the work they do with students on college campuses. This is not new news in composition studies. As noted earlier, others such as Worsham (1998) and Miller (1991) have explored not only the affective dimension of our work but also the possibility of emotions as critical practice.

Along these lines, we might consider again Elbow's free-writing narrative. He felt "wounded and tired," a "total failure," "lonely, hurting, and panicked." These feelings are the grounds upon which Elbow set out to revolutionize his own—and eventually the field's—approach to the teaching of writing. And yet, most free writing today seems taught as a pleasant and liberating activity, in which students are invited to enjoy the delights of a creative process. In its inception, however, free writing was not just a personal strategy to generate text, a solution to an individual's problem; it was an implicit critique of a system of education that induced shame. It was, in the spirit of the times, a revolutionary way to reimagine how an education in writing might be dramatically different. Now, free writing is just another practice of invention among many others, and the original affective energies—fear, frustration, even anger—give way to "invention strategies" and the vague gesture toward best practices that should come along with some sense of sat-

isfaction. We should note by way of this example that any particular emotion is not inherently and always a good or a bad thing. As Elbow wrote, it was imperative to overcome shame, for instance. But overcoming is not the same as outright denial, and it should not be confused with the active suppression of bad feeling or with the pseudoscientific treatment of negative emotion as maladaptation. And just as we have argued that happiness is not always a positive, we do not endorse negative emotions tout court. Emotions are not the same always and everywhere; emotions are historical, social, and strategic phenomena that must be treated as such. Hence, the new emotion studies cited in this article work outward from a particular challenge.

Queer theorists know the emotionally normative dynamic well, the move to forget difficult feelings while promoting success narratives and happiness causes. David Halperin and Valerie Traub, in a recent collection, have called for exploration of a new analytic, "gay shame," or the critical probing of aspects of queer life that, in contrast to the out-loud-and-proud ethos of gay rights activism, have been left behind or purposely elided because they do not quite fit the narratives of happy pride, self-acceptance, and assimilation to larger cultural norms of social and sexual acceptability, such as the pursuit of marriage equality (Halperin and Traub 2010). What Halperin and others, like Berlant and Halberstam, know well is the critical power of negative emotion. The Stonewall riots in 1969 that made the gay liberation movement nationally visible erupted from people who, to borrow Elbow's words, felt "wounded and tired," and "lonely, hurting, and panicked." They were also angry and pissed off. Like Elbow reflecting on the educational establishment or the Vietnam War draft that he resisted by mobilizing conscientious objectors, queers at the Stonewall Inn wanted not just personal change but *structural* change. And they turned their affective response to transformative power.

The cost of forgetting negative emotion, even the experience of failure, is high. Success feels good, but it does not reorient us against unjust norms. Success, as it trumps personal failure, can also numb us to failures that are structural.

Imagining what a pedagogy or framework for failure might look like is difficult. But we can begin with the *Framework for Success* and its proposed habits of mind, and we can "zap" them. Gay activist Arthur Evans wrote a manifesto titled "How to Zap Straights" (1973) in which he advocated for public displays of homoerotic affection designed "to rouse closet gays from their apathy, direct gay anger toward oppressive straight institutions, and create a widespread feeling of gay identity" (593). Key to Evans's tactic was the

development of negative feeling among gays, particularly a sense of injustice and even outrage, to create structural change.

Following Evans's lead, we might "zap" the *Framework*'s habits of mind. For instance, we can take our opening habit, "curiosity," as the desire to know more about the world and revisit its etymology that tells us to *worry* more about the world; in this case, we should remember Michel Foucault and approach the world of assessment with some pointed concern, or worry, as we ask our students to "desire" in certain ways and to open themselves up.[9] With Foucault we might wax skeptical that such vulnerability is always in the interest of the student, and we might pay more attention to the function of power that is the desire to know (i.e., discipline). Or we can zap *responsibility*, defined as "the ability to take ownership of one's actions and understand the consequences of those actions for oneself and others." Fair enough. But note how this definition of responsibility, following the best neoliberal practice, seems to place the burden of action and consequence on the individual. What about institutional responsibility? What about public education's responsibility to the students that it engages? Given our protracted economic malaise, an emphasis on career preparation positions students for work in systems in which success will be increasingly hard to obtain. Is this a responsible pedagogy?

To be fair, the *Framework* is an attempt to be responsive to the needs of both our students and the institutions responsible for educating them. It tries to cut the difference between promoting democratic habits of mind, on one hand, and an educational culture that demands quantifiable results, on the other. Its strategy of accommodation, though, might itself be destined to fail. In her critique of the *Framework*, Johnson (2013: 529) argues that promoting "habits of mind" might prove untenable as a sufficient response to calls for measurable skills and demonstration of success: "The *Framework* positions habits of mind as attitudes and intellectual processes, but pressures in the national landscape may motivate writing teachers and program administrators to position habits of mind as outcome—end results from an assignment or program that external audiences may be interested in assessing." As Johnson summarizes, "The convergence of habits of mind and assessment seems to offer two unsatisfying options for fostering habits of mind: (1) position them as assessable outcomes to assure their significance, or (2) position them as unmeasurable and fundamentally antithetical to large-scale assessment" (534). We argue that a third critique is necessary: how might the habits of mind as articulated in the *Framework*, whether measurable or not, (1) direct students toward normative success while rendering failure patholog-

ical and (2) reinforce "happiness causes," such as career and college success, that become naturalized by rendering in terms of personal feeling certain vexed relations that may sometimes be addressed better by social critique and the negative emotions that serve as markers of a different sort?

As a field, as educators, as writers, we have dealt with failure before. Think of Elbow and his revolutionary pedagogies. However, we are now thirty-plus years down the line, and we are living in a situation where classroom realities, administrative pressures, and lifestyle exigencies of the sort treated by Berlant and Halberstam seek "failure frameworks" that could be helpful in the face of success frameworks that appear all too distant.

In fact, examples of discomfort and pain, even failure, characterize portions of the literacy narratives of many in our field, including Shor's *Empowering Education*, Keith Gilyard's *Voices of the Self* (1991), Victor Villanueva's *Bootstraps* (1993), Morris Young's *Minor Re/Visions* (2004), and Vershawn A. Young's *Your Average Nigga* (2007). These works extend the literacy narrative of someone like Elbow, writing about his own alienation from academic writing and modes of thinking. They also complement Elbow's relatively (white) bourgeois alienation from the academy by marking the experiences of those whose race and/or class position them even more awkwardly with respect to these norms. Villanueva writes explicitly about how a position feels, and especially about the bad feelings that announce themselves with tiresome regularity and compel a response: "As the perennial outsider, I am always conscious of having to detail the political, of always having to foreground and contextualize, of having to assume that the matters that have given rise to my worldview are foreign to most of the students, maybe even all of the students" (quoted in Gil-Gómez 2012: n.p.). Note how the feeling in this case does not come with punctuated anger or fear, against the background of some stable equilibrium or comfort. Instead, we feel with Villanueva a kind of exhaustion; the words *perennial* and *always* mark a cost, in mind and body, of constantly having to explain one's presence and justify one's contribution. Such a felt sense of one's work, of one's literate practice, involves more than just learning how to deal with troubling emotions; it is an ongoing engagement with an emotional disposition, with a condition of negative affect, that characterizes the experiences of many in an academy and a society that position us along axes of inside and outside, belonging and exclusion. In this case and others, negative affect works in the name of literacy education. Indeed, it is hard to imagine the critique existing *without* the attendant anxiety and fear of marginality—of being marginalized—as its motivation.

Notes

1. For instance, even before emotion studies met composition studies to begin unpacking the affectual dimensions of writing instruction and writing studies scholarship, Miller was attuning us to the emotional tenors, dispositions, and constructions of our work in "The Sad Women in the Basement," a chapter in her book *Textual Carnivals* (1991). Even beyond the title's evocative metaphor, Miller asserted that "the composition teacher consciously and unconsciously initiates students into the culture's discourse on language, which is always at one with action, emotion, and regulatory establishments" (138).
2. The following examples are all drawn from the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), s.v. "curiosity."
3. We do not intend to cast aspersion on all assessment activities. Indeed, drawing on a rich body of scholarship and practice in composition studies, our writing programs at the University of California, Irvine have used a variety of quantitative and qualitative assessments to good effect. We, like the framers, struggle to conceive and enact assessments that account for the complexities of writing and thinking pedagogy.
4. Kristine Johnson, in her response to the *Framework*, similarly affirms her belief in the relationship between named habits of mind and named experiences but questions the implied exclusivity of this relationship: "The habits of mind can also be developed in many other ways—studying science, for example, or participating in sports, art, music, dance, scouting, or 4-H" (2013: 541).
5. Costa's numerous works include theoretical and practical texts, for instance, edited collections such as *Developing Minds: A Resource Book for Teaching Thinking* (2001) and, with Bena Kallick, a series of handbooks called Habits of Mind: A Developmental Series (2000), which comprises four books: *Discovering and Exploring Habits of Mind*, *Activating and Engaging Habits of Mind*, *Assessing and Reporting Growth in Habits of Mind*, and *Integrating and Sustaining Habits of Mind*. The emphasis throughout is on developing teaching strategies that attempt actively to cultivate habits of mind.
6. This list is taken from Costa and Kallick's "Describing Sixteen Habits of Mind" (2007), which is adapted from their Habits of Mind series.
7. Here we can cite *Academically Adrift* (Arum and Roksa 2011) and its reliance on the College Learning Assessment as a famous instance of an unhappy report on the skills and strategies that college-educated Americans are—and are not—developing.
8. Raymond Williams, associated with the New Left, introduced "structures of feeling" tied to the analytics of class and class conflict (see 1977: 128–35).
9. Foucault's "incitement to discourse" from *The History of Sexuality* is meant to yield multiple effects of displacement, intensification, reorientation, and "modification of desire itself" ([1976] 1978: 23).

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